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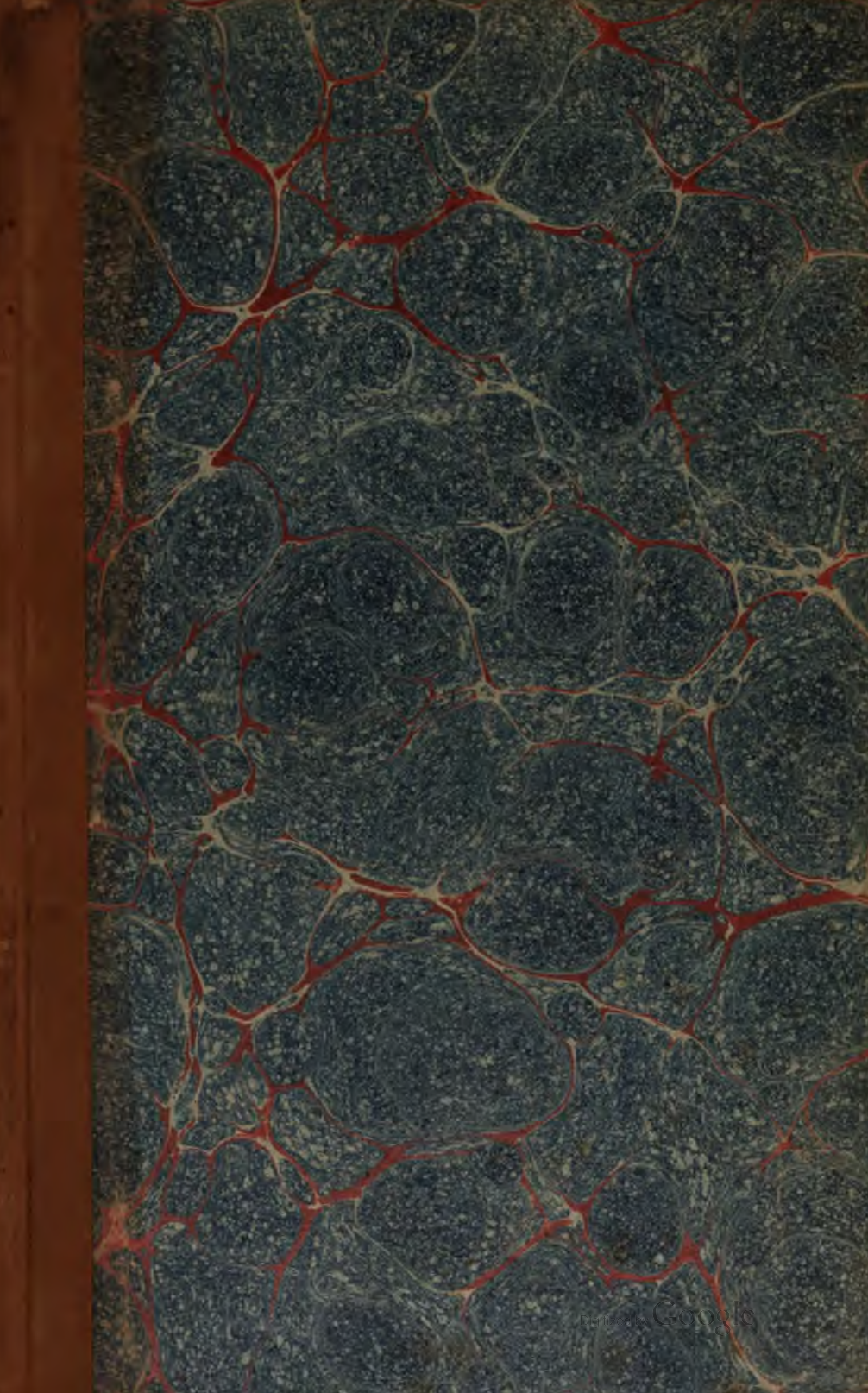
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NEUTRALITY
IN TIME OF DANGER TO THE CHURCH,
AN ABANDONMENT OF THE FAITH, AND
VERY SHORT-SIGHTED WORLDLY POLICY:

An Admonition

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND,

DELIVERED IN A SERMON

AT SOUTH-HACKNEY CHURCH,

ON SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 1835,

BY THE REV. H. H. NORRIS, M.A.

Rector of the said Parish,

**PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S, AND LLANDAFF, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE
EARL OF SHAFTESBURY.**

LONDON:

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NEUTRALITY

IN TIME OF DANGER TO THE CHURCH, AN
ABANDONMENT OF THE FAITH, &c.

ESTHER, chap. iv. verse 14.

“ If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed ; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ? ”

THE Book of Esther receives its designation from a Jewess of that name, who found that favour in the eyes of Ahasuerus, the Persian monarch, that, in preference to a large assemblage of the fairest young virgins submitted to his choice, he raised her, from an obscure condition, to be the Queen of that mighty empire. To her it is that the text is addressed by her kinsman Mordecai, who had brought her up, and been secretly instrumental in her advancement. It is therefore the expostula-

tion of a Jewish foster-father with his adopted child, whom, amidst the rebuke and blasphemy of a Heathen metropolis, he had sedulously nurtured in the principles of true religion. The occasion which called it forth, appears, upon the face of it, to have been a backwardness on her part to exert the influence belonging to her high station in averting from the Jews generally some great evil with which they were menaced; and its purpose is, to make her sensible of how little avail to her own safety was the timid policy she was disposed to pursue—to call back her thoughts to the lessons of her youth on God's over-ruling providence in the affairs of men, with special reference to her own nation—and to put her upon considering how far the providing against the impending emergency may have been in the Divine counsels in her remarkable elevation—and thus to brace up the energies of her mind to a resolution better befitting that light of revelation it was her privilege to enjoy, and the distinguished token of the Divine favour towards her which she had already received.

To put you in full possession of the force of this remonstrance, it will be necessary, in the first place, to state the case to which it applies; and when that has been done, and the grounds have been explained by which Mordecai's strong language of rebuke and intimidation is supported, I will then shew you how we are affected by it, and make the practical application to ourselves.

The parties then to be regarded as principals on the occasion are the Jews—the Church of God under the old dispensation, whilst the partition wall separated them from all other nations, as His peculiar people. At the period before us they had been released by Cyrus from their long captivity about twenty years; but, as during its continuance many of them had formed establishments, and realized property in the different places they had been sent to colonize, and a new generation had sprung up whose local attachments were of course biassed in favour of the land of their nativity, the parties so circumstanced, in very many instances, preferred remaining in their present abodes, to availing themselves of the permission granted to return to Judea; and thus, though upwards of fifty thousand did go back thither, there was still, as the context states, a large residue dispersed among the Heathen inhabitants, in all the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the Persian empire^a.

Of this number was Mordecai, who held a post in the King's household which required his daily attendance at the palace gate; and who so little affected worldly greatness that, even after Esther became the royal consort, and after he had, in addition to this title of consanguinity, established the strongest personal claim to advancement by the detection of a conspiracy against the life of Ahasuerus, he still studiously concealed the fact of

^a Esther iii. 8.

his relationship to her, and as studiously suppressed his plea of merit for the momentous service he had performed, and went on, as before, executing unobtrusively his subordinate office of "sitting at the King's gate."

It was here that the offence was taken in revenge of which the destruction referred to in the text was plotted and contrived. For, it having pleased Ahasuerus to "promote Haman," and not only to "set his seat above all the princes that were with him," but to command, moreover, that "all the King's servants that were in the King's gate should bow before him, and do him reverence^a," Mordecai would do neither the one nor the other; and when questioned as to the grounds of his refusal, replied "that he ~~was a Jew~~^b," intimating thereby that his religion forbade it; and though, with reference to his own honour, he was, as we have seen, so indifferent, that he may almost be said to have clung to his comparatively humble station (his own concealment of his pretensions, as was subsequently proved, being the only bar to his rivalling even Haman in pre-eminence), yet where the honour and authority of God were concerned, his spirit disdained compromise, and he was resolutely unbending.

With respect to Haman, it must now be remarked that, on the first introduction of his name,

^a Esther, iii. 1, 2.

^b *Ibid.* iii. 4.

the sacred historian describes him as "*the Agagite*," i. e. of the posterity of the nation, the Amalakites, over which that Agag reigned, whom the Prophet Samuel, in fulfilment of the Divine judgment, but partially executed by Saul, "hewed in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal^b," and of which the Scriptural memorial is that, "not fearing God," they were implacable in their enmity against his chosen people, whom, without the slightest provocation, they were ever seeking either to injure or destroy^c.

This, I say, is specially to be noted, for the designation is no common-place appendage to Haman's name, but is designedly affixed as the index to his conduct on the present occasion. It brings his parentage under observation—the whole race of Amalek—and calls to remembrance all their evil will, so spitefully self-engendered, and treasured up with aggravated malignity through so long a lapse of years, from the first going out of Israel from Egypt, when, taking advantage of their being "faint and weary, they smote the hindmost of them," whose very feebleness ought to have been their protection; to the day of Jerusalem's extreme distress, when, instead of the commiseration due from neighbours and relations, they cheered her destroyers with the encouraging acclamation,

^a Esther, iii. 1.

^b 1 Sam. xv. 33.

^c Deut. xxv. 17, 18. Judg. vi. 3, 5. 2 Chron. xx. 10, 11. Ps. lxxxiii. 7.

"Down with her! down with her, even to the ground^a!" and thus it points to the source from whence was derived that rancorous spirit, which so raged in Haman that the mere sight of Mordecai sitting at the King's gate, when the rest of the attendants were doing him obeisance, robbed the royal distinctions lavished upon him of all their pleasurable sensations^b, and stimulated, to that exorbitance, his craving for revenge, that "he thought it scorn," as the history states, "to lay hands on Mordecai alone," but set his heart upon destroying "all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai^c."

To accomplish this atrocious purpose some address was necessary, in so fabricating a charge against them that the fiat of the Persian Monarch might be obtained for their extermination. It was indeed true that "their laws were diverse from those of all people^d;" but still they were God's laws; and God had not left Himself without witness to all the world that they were of His appointment, or that "in keeping of them there was great reward."

On this diversity, however, Haman founded his accusation. It was a truth which could not be disputed, and was obviously a specious ground on

^a Ps. cxxxvii. 7.

^b Esther v. 13.

^c Esther iii. 6.

^d *Ibid.* 8.

which to raise the succeeding calumny, that "they kept not the King's laws," and were not to be suffered but to the great prejudice "of the King's profit" and the prosperity of the empire^a. The ascendancy of Haman over the mind of Ahasuerus, gave all the force of truth to his malicious misrepresentations. The Jews were given to him "to do with them as seemed to him good;" and "Letters," dictated by himself, having been despatched "into all the King's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day—the thirteenth of Adar—and to take the spoil of them for a prey," "the King and Haman sat down to drink^b:" the former making sure that the tremendous retribution was irrevocably ordained, and that the long-harboured and exasperated enmity of the whole race of Amalek would receive a plenary gratification.

It is at this point of time that Mordecai interposes his admonition in the text. He had sent to Esther "a copy of the decree," and had "charged her to go in unto the King, and make supplication for her people^c;" and she had faltered in the promptitude of her obedience to the requisition, alleging the probable impotency of her interference, and the inevitable penalty of death incurred

^a Esther iii. 8.

^b *Ibid.* iii. 13, 15.

^c *Ibid.* iv. 8.

by intruding uncalled into his presence, unless the disposition of the moment should induce him to hold out the sceptre, and so stay the execution^a. Mordecai meets this evasive answer as became the guide of her youth, who had so sedulously indocctrinated her in the covenant of her God. "Think not with thyself," he says, "that thou shalt escape in the King's house more than all the Jews; for if thou altogether holdest thy peace, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this^b?" The awakening appeal roused from its lethargy her slumbering faith. She took immediately the holy resolution to risk the perilous alternative, casting herself upon the promises of God; and having, in common with her proscribed people, humbled herself before Him, invoking His providential interposal in her behalf, she presented herself within the forbidden boundary. The golden sceptre was stretched out. The tide of royal favour was turned towards her, to the extent of whatever she should desire; and circumstances, in appearance of the most casual occurrence, all conspired marvellously to conduct her intervention to complete success; insomuch, that Haman was hanged upon the gallows he had erected for Mor-

^a Esther iv. 11.

^b *Ibid.* 13, 14.

decai, having first led him in triumph, in royal array, through the streets of Shushan, proclaiming him his own supplanter, both in the king's favour, and in the honour intended for himself : " the device which he devised against the Jews " resulted only in the destruction of their enemies ; and so far were they from being either lessened or impoverished by the exterminating decree, that their numbers were multiplied by a large influx of converts to their faith from the very population whose swords had been directed against them ; and their own forbearance alone prevented them from enriching themselves to a vast extent ; for the whole spoil of the seventy-five thousand whom they slew was declared their own, but " they laid not their hands upon it*."

Such is the statement of the case that called forth Mordecai's expostulation ; upon the facts of which I must not omit to observe, that they have come down to us accompanied by this indisputable confirmation, that to this very day the Jews preserve the memorial of their deliverance by the annual celebration of the festival instituted by Mordecai^b. I now proceed to inquire into the grounds upon which this expostulation was founded. And the first ground taken—the short-sightedness of Esther's policy, upon her own principle of self-preservation, in avoiding the hazard, to incur the

* Esther ix. 10, 15, 16.

^b *Ibid.* ix. 21.

certainty of death—needs only a distinct statement to be displayed in all its force. For it being the law of the Medes and Persians that the King himself could make no alteration in a decree which he had once established^a, the royal authority could not have interposed to exempt her from its operation; and, as Mordecai laid it before her, she could no more have escaped in the King's house, than the rest of her devoted people in the provinces.

But, if there was not in the King himself any power of reversal, to what purpose was Esther's going in unto him, and making her supplication? Here Mordecai's faith inspired him with confidence, and furnished the strong reason he proceeded to urge in furtherance of his remonstrance. It was his uncompromising steadfastness in the covenant of his God, and persevering disdain of all temporizing compliances, that had revived in Haman's heart, with aggravated bitterness, the hereditary enmity of his progenitors, and brought the whole house of Israel to this fearful crisis. It was God, therefore, that was challenged by the intended massacre; and that too in the attributes of which he is most jealous, his honour and his fidelity; and it would have been a failure in Mordecai, in the faith he had hitherto so heroically maintained, had he for one moment doubted of the divine protection.

^a Esther, viii. 8.

Although, therefore, the decree was gone forth, and the day fixed for exterminating his devoted race by a general carnage, he sent word to Esther, in terms of the fullest assurance that language could convey, that "enlargement and deliverance should arise to the Jews," and that if she "altogether held her peace," and so forfeited her privilege of being God's instrument in procuring it, it "should arise from another place, but she and her father's house should be destroyed." And he brought home to her own experiences this undaunted and most impressive communication, by putting her upon pondering in her heart the disposals of Providence, so legible in her inheritance of the throne of glory, and in the several incidents by which it was brought to pass; and upon bethinking herself what were God's purposes in her elevation, and whether it was not "for such a time as this, that she was come to the kingdom."

In a member of any other nation of the earth, at the period in question, to have thus cast scorn upon its enemies' machinations, and pre-assured it of its own security, would have been in the highest degree presumptuous. But in a Jew it was an act of religion—the ordinary exercise of his faith—for to his nation, as St. Paul states, it "pertained the adoption" to be God's peculiar people, and, together with that high prerogative,

“the promises”^a with which the writings of Moses and the Prophets abound.

With these promises, as they were made successively to Abraham and his posterity—to David and his royal line—amounting, in the last instance, to a divine pledge, that the kingdom given to him, sustained equally against the injuries and decays incident to all other kingdoms, should be established for ever, the mind of the devout Mordecai was doubtless deeply imbued. He had, moreover, himself witnessed the literal fulfilment of those remarkable predictions, which related to his nation’s deliverance from the Babylonish captivity, and restoration to their own land, precisely at the time appointed. He had also personal knowledge of those visible interpositions of the Almighty, in the two several cases of Shadrach and his companions, and of Daniel^b; and, in addition to these sure grounds of confidence, he was acquainted with the more recent revelations, both of the last-named prophet^c and of Haggai, the one of which secured to the Jews a perpetuation of their kingdom for at least four hundred and ninety years, when their Prince, Messiah, was to be raised up to his father David’s throne; and the other confirmed this divine pledge, by the further representation of the glories

^a Rom. ix. 4.

^b Dan. chap. iii & vi.

^c Dan. ix. 25.

and the felicities which should be showered down upon them, under his dominion^a.

All these strong incentives—the lessons of Esther's youth—so calculated to constrain her to quit herself as the emergency required, must have flowed, in quick succession, into her mind, upon receiving Mordecai's expostulation; and had she not, by a prompt compliance, given evidence of her faith, the very wife of Haman would have pronounced her condemnation; for no sooner did she hear of the task imposed on him, to conduct his victim in royal array through the streets of Shushan, than she declared, in concert with all her Heathen counsellors, that he would fall before this proscribed object of his bitter hatred, "if Mordecai were of the seed of the Jews^b."

Such are the circumstances under which Mordecai expostulated with Esther in the strong language of the text, and such the ample warrant for the high tone of authority that he assumed in urging the admonition upon her. I come now to show you how we are affected by it, and to make the practical application to ourselves. And if we are now, what the Jews were then, God's chosen people—the people pointed at by Christ, to whom the kingdom of God was to be given, when taken from them^c—an integral part of that people—or, to express the high privilege in

^a Haggai, ii. 6-9. ^b Esther, vi. 13. ^c Mat. xxi. 43.

other words, a pure and apostolical portion of Christ's Holy Catholic Church ; and if the present time, the course of this world now transpiring be, with reference to *us* in the above capacity "*such a time*" as the crisis we have been contemplating was to *them*, then are we individually, and to the extent of our respective abilities, *equally* with Esther, the parties charged by Mordecai's warning voice ; and if we hold *our* peace, are as much " fore-ordained" in his denouncement to what would have been, in that case, *her* " condemnation," as the " ungodly men," in St. Jude's days, were to the two several condemnations of " Cain and Balaam," by " going in the way of the one," and " running greedily after the error of the other." For God's judgments—His decisions upon human conduct—recorded in the Sacred Oracles, whether pronounced by Himself or by His servants, are there promulgated for our admonition, and, equally with His laws, are parts and parcels of the sacred code ordained for our rule and governance.

Now it is clear from St. Paul, that to the *two* religious classes of Jew and Gentile, into which the world was *divinely* distributed under the former dispensation, *a third* was added immediately upon the promulgation of the gospel ; for, writing to the Corinthians, and charging them to " give

^a Jude, 11.

none offence," he thus particularizes the parties contemplated in his prohibition, "neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God^a;" and, if we seek further acquaintance with this newly-created community, we shall find it to be a people called out from both the other two divisions of mankind, who, receiving Christ, and him crucified, as the wisdom and the power of God, were made by baptism one body in him, and, in virtue of this incorporation, "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise^b." Of this community, church, or kingdom, it is equally clear that somewhere or other it is now existing in the world, for Christ's promise is express, that his kingdom shall have no end; and further, that it is as much separated and distinguished from all other bodies of men as the Jews were of old from all other nations, for not only are there transferred to it, as is set forth by St. Peter, those distinctive designations of "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people^c," which God himself ascribed to Israel, to set it up on high, and proclaim its pre-eminence above all the earth^d; but, together with these ascriptions, there are transferred also, though not the identical prerogatives of Judaism, yet prerogatives corres-

^a 1 Cor. x. 32.

^b Gal. iii. 29

^c 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^d Exod. xix. 5, 6.

ponding with those of that economy, the very substances of its shadows—the law of faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ, instead of the law of works, as *its charter of incorporation*—the Christian priesthood instead of that of Moses, but by its triple order of ministry assimilated to it, as *its dispensing officers*—and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, instead of those of Circumcision and the Passover, as *its federal institutions*—and thus is it rendered as well defined and as conspicuous, as Israel's chosen race, yea, conformably to our Lord's declaration^a, as the great luminary in the heavens to all “whose minds the God of this world has not blinded^b” to its marvellous light.

The first question then growing out of the text, in reference to its application to ourselves, may now be decided in the affirmative, beyond all reasonable dispute; for THE FAITH—THE MINISTRY—and THE SACRAMENTS—the lavishments of God's predilection upon his church—and the instruments of that mighty working by which its great salvation is imparted, the same in essence, though differently modified, under the former and the present dispensations, are therefore, in every age, the divine vouchers of *its identity* throughout the whole of its earthly course; and being still, through God's mercy, the distinguishing privileges of our

^a Mat. v. 14.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 4.

communion, preserved in their integrity, "as once delivered to the saints," are our divine vouchers also, intelligible to all, that we are an integral part of that holy fellowship—of the same spiritual family with the Jews in the days of Esther—children of Abraham in common with them—heirs also of the promises—the people of God.

So far then it appears we are personally interested in Mordecai's expostulation. To bring it completely home to us, our respective times and circumstances with reference to our own portion of the Catholic Church, must also correspond; and though, on first glancing upon the case, this obvious discrepancy presents itself, that no overt act of hatred so revolting to humanity has been perpetrated, as the promulging a decree of extermination against our whole communion, yet the spiritual wickedness, constituting the very gall of bitterness in this sanguinary proscription, may still be abroad amongst us, and in active operation, compassing the same ends, with a refined malignity, by circumvention and intrigue.

The times of Julian are precisely those characterized in this position; for that apostate from Christianity, in the course he adopted towards the church, studiously abstained from open and direct persecution. He affected, with reference to religion, that specious impartiality, which leaves to every man full power of judging for him-

self what faith and worship he shall adhere to; but, under this mask of moderation, he withdrew from the Christians, and their spiritual rulers, the privileges that had been granted to them—he shut up the schools in which they exclusively taught philosophy and the liberal arts, turning the whole empire into a college of infidelity—he encouraged the sectaries who brought dishonour upon the Gospel by their divisions—and, whilst reviling the Mosaic history, and ridiculing the Jewish law, he distinguished the Jews by special marks of his indulgence*.

This was his insidious policy as ecclesiastical history sets it out. The statement is most remarkable with reference to our own Church, in the times in which we live: for terms could not be chosen more accurately descriptive, even in their minutest details, of the spoliations and restraints now under legislative deliberation, for its future discountenance, and intended, if it be possible, to be passed into laws. And if, upon comparing this sapping system with Haman's projected carnage, a question can be raised as to its essential identity with that tyrannous decree, either in the spirit

* See Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. i, p. 329. Van Mildert's *Boyle's Lectures*, p. 166. See also Appendix to ditto, p. 27, for the terms of sarcasm in which Julian issues his orders for the confiscation of the whole property of the Church of Edessa.

which suggested it, or in the issue, the subtle contriver's own testimony, will set that question at rest; for Julian made it no secret, that the motive by which he was actuated was hatred to the Gospel; and that the policy he pursued was adopted upon a conviction both of the insufficiency of violence to effect its extirpation; and that the dexterous management of undermining expedients under the semblance of clemency, would accomplish that impious design^a. But the same EYE, whose watchfulness over Israel was its security against Haman's conspirings, was still expanded with unslumbering vigilance upon the Church: and as, in the former instance, the reckless persecutor was taken in his own snare, and perished suddenly by his own contrivings, so, in the latter, was the treacherous dealer, with almost equal unpreparedness for such an event, made a betrayer to himself; for he rashly embroiled himself in a war, which he as imprudently conducted, and the lance of a Persian soldier cut him short in his career, when he had lived just long enough to develop all the crafty wiliness that he imagined^b.

The time then in which it has pleased God to cast our lot, is precisely *such a time* as that which the text refers to. It is one of those seasons "of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy," which, many a

^a See Van Mildert's Boyle's Lectures, p. 167.

^b Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, vol. i, p. 330.

time, in ages past, the church has experienced, and to which, from a moral necessity, it is still continually liable, in its passage through a world equally at enmity with it, and the God of its salvation. The very Israel of God, under the Gospel dispensation, it is now publicly proscribed, in the very terms I use, as "*a vile incubus*" upon Christianity; and the Hamans amongst us, who revile it in these atrocious terms, and who are conspiring together, and taking their counsel, to blot out its very remembrance from the earth, have been long too successfully preparing the way for this consummation of their hatred, by spurious admixtures and disfigurements of their own perverse conceits, and by confounding it with the corruptest counterfeits.

The expostulation of Mordecai, therefore, appeals to us with all the force belonging to it in its original application; and its requirements are two-fold—to *know the Church*—and to know also, with reference to *it*, our respective *responsibilities*.

The first and fundamental counsel, is to know the Church, the people of God, under all his dispensations. A *single nation*, issuing from *the loins* of Abraham, and propagated by *natural generation* under Moses—a conflux from *all nations*, em-

* See Report of Proceedings at Annual Meeting of Society of Ecclesiastical Knowledge.—*World*, May 16, 1831.

bracing *the faith* of Abraham, and propagated by *baptismal regeneration* under Christ.

To know this Church—this holy fellowship—to distinguish it from all alien communities, as in the former case by its *carnal*, so in the latter by its *spiritual* genealogy, and to know, moreover, respecting it, what Mordecai avouched, with such full assurance of faith, and what our Lord affirmed, in terms incapable of clearer enunciation, that, whatever hostility may assail it, from some quarter or other, “enlargement and deliverance” shall, in God’s good time, arise; so that “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it”—to know all this, and so to know it, as to *act* upon it, with a steadfastness commensurate with that evinced both by Mordecai and Esther, and under circumstances as apparently desperate as theirs, is the *first principle* of Christian discernment—it is that principle laid universally as the basis of the life of faith, from one end of the Scriptures to the other, and exemplified, in every instance, by those lights of the world, who are divinely commended to us as the patterns of our profession, from the great Patriarch, who became “a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth,” that he might “seek a better country^b,” to the great Apostle, who “suffered loss of all things, and counted all things but dung, so that he might win Christ^c”—“might be found in

^a Mat. xvi. 18. ^b Heb. xi. 13, 15. ^c Philip. iii. 8.

Him," in His body, the Church, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all".

Let this last apostolic announcement, I beseech you, be impressed deeply upon your mind, and having first taken due account, both severally and collectively, of those various symbols and similitudes—the ark of Noah^b—the burning bush of Moses^c—the hill of Sion^d—the net cast into the sea^e—the grain of mustard seed^f—the golden candlestick^g—the two witnesses clothed in sackcloth^h—the woman clothed with the sun, having the moon at her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her headⁱ—all employed, together with their respective particulars, by the divine founder of the Church, to define its nature—to illustrate the chequered circumstances of its earthly course—and to convey the most decisive pledges of its ultimate triumph and exaltation; then add St. Paul's fore-cited figure to this luminous assemblage of descriptive imagery, and fix your contemplations upon it, as "THE BODY OF CHRIST"^k, which he has been preparing for himself from the foundation of the world^l—"for which" he gave himself^m," and is now become "head over all things",

^a Ephes. i. 23.

^b Gen. vi. 14. comp. 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

^c Exod. iii. 2, 3.

^d Ps. cxxv. 1.

^e Mat. xiii. 47.

^f Mat. xiii. 31.

^g Rev. i. 20.

^h *Ibid.* xi. 3.

ⁱ *Ibid.* xii. 1.

^k Eph. i. 22, 23.

^l Mat. xxv. 34.

^m Eph. v. 25.

ⁿ *Ibid.* i. 22.

which is adopted into an union so intimate with himself, that when persecuted by Saul in the zeal of unbelief, "why persecutest thou *me*," were the overwhelming terms of his tremendous appropriation; and which, by all the "threatening and slaughter breathed out against it," after Haman's and Saul's ensamples, and all the havoc made of it in all ages, by open enemies and false brethren, he is refining like gold purified seven times in the fire, that, at the great day of the consummation of the mystery of God, he "may present it to himself a glorious Church, holy and without blemish^b"—as the great Apostle, with profound pathos, sets it forth, "*the fulness of Him that filleth all in all*^c."

By this course of research, diligently and devoutly pursued through all these Divine sources of knowledge, the first counsel to be gathered from the text will be turned to that profit, which the transcendant interests vested in it so imperiously demand. You will know the Church, that great masterpiece and manifestation of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, adapted to the extreme exigencies of a ruined world, a refuge throughout its generations from the wrath to come—you will see it, in its perfect beauty, the joy of the whole earth—and you will take your Saviour's estimate of it, that it is your only indispensable possession—"that pearl of great price,

^a Acts, ix. 4.

^b Eph. v. 27.

^c *Ibid.* i. 23.

which you must purchase and retain, if need be, at the cost of *all that you have*^a.”

It now only remains that, in the searching suggestion of the text, I should call the thoughts of each of you to the consideration of this responsibility, for who that has, in any respect, been distinguished from the mass of mankind, either in temporal prosperity, or in intellectual endowments, can know, with greater certainty than in Esther's case, whether he has come to the station he fills, and to the sway which it gives him in the counsels and affairs of men, “*for such a time as this*.”

Were there any thing *miraculous*, either in Esther's elevation—in the issue which resulted from her interposition with Ahasuerus—or in the intermediate incidents by which that issue was brought about, some question might reasonably be raised as to the relevancy of her example; but let all the circumstances of her narrative be severally examined, the fall of Vashti—and her preferment—and reception afterwards when she made her supplication—the conspiracy against the life of Ahasuerus—and Mordecai's detection of it—the omission on the part of the King to reward him at the time—and the greatly-enhanced measure of that recompense, when a sleepless night induced the monarch to have the hours beguiled by the records of his kingdom, and he was suddenly smitten with the

^a Mat. xiii. 46.

reproach of having made no requital to his deliverer:—let these circumstances be subjected severally to the minutest scrutiny, and they must be admitted to be of *ordinary* occurrence; and it is not till the catastrophe is brought to pass; that God's providence is discovered to have over-ruled them all, and made them work together to produce it; and that Esther appears to be, what Mordecai's faith prompted him to anticipate, as much God's appointed instrument to preserve His Church by a great deliverance, as Joseph and Moses, both raised up by the same *secret* disposals, had been in ages past, when in the one case famine, and in the other oppression, had reduced this chosen people to similar extremities.

If then a weak, a defective, or a perverted faith, if a fearful or a divided heart, or, what is worse, of a frame of mind allied to Gallio's, and caring nothing for the things of Jesus Christ, have hitherto indisposed you to regard the signs of the times, and the constraining call they make upon you to quit yourselves towards the Church as His faithful soldiers and servants, be admonished by Mordecai's warning voice—catch a portion of that “*zeal*” for this holy heritage with which, as the Evangelist testifies^a, its divine founder, in the days of His flesh, was absolutely “*eaten*,” and rouse your spiritual energies to a more enlightened judgment, and to worthier resolutions. To Him and to His Church it is of the smallest possible

^a John ii. 17.

account, whether you come to its help against the modern Agagites now as it were gaping to devour it, or parry the obligation with specious pretences, but to yourselves it is of the most intense importance : and though, in the text, it is upon Mordecai's sole authority that these positions rest, because Esther's amended purpose, not to hold her peace, superseded the necessity of deliverance from another place, and changed the threatened destruction of herself and family into a splendid recompense, yet that they are faithful sayings, of irreversible authority, and universal application in God's providential government, there can be no reasonable doubt ; for many are the recorded instances of God's preserving His Church in despite of the abandonment of its natural protectors, and no appeal beyond ourselves, the grafted branches into the stock of Abraham when the Jews were broken off, can be necessary to show that God knows how to provide effectually for the Church's perpetuation, at the same time that any unprofitable portion of it is destroyed.

Let Esther's example, then, be adopted as your pattern, and steadfastly embracing her awakened conviction, in the enlarged view of it which I have been endeavouring to set forth, take each of you this true estimate of your Christian responsibility, that *you* are come to your respective places and influence in society, as *she* came to the kingdom,

"for such a time as this," for the particular exigencies, with especial reference to the Church, of your own probationary period; and casting yourselves, as she did, by humiliation and prayer, upon the divine succour and support, brace up your minds to the heroic standard of her determination, so impressively summed up in her decisive words, "if I perish, I perish".^a If it please God that my life be sacrificed in this perilous service, His will be done. I cannot devote it to a better cause, nor can I hazard its forfeiture more profitably to myself, then when it will be *gain* to lose it. Let this then, finally, be your established purpose; and though, in the self-confident calculations of conspiring unbelievers, our Church's days are numbered, as were those of Israel at the crisis before us by her inveterate foe, and sport is made of it in their impious carousals^b, as already prostrate at their feet, after the same ensample, yet emulate Esther's fortitude with unwavering resolution. For this is one of the Church's divinely-specified prerogatives, that that kingdom shall perish which deserts its cause^c, and the same issue

^a Esther iv. 16.

^b See *The World*, June 19, 1828, for an account of the Commemoration Dinner on the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, a document which well deserves to be placed in a less fugitive repository.

^c Isai. lx. 12.

that Esther's narrative has recorded shall ultimately defeat, in every instance, all the evil which the craft and subtilty of the devil or man works against it—*their* wicked devices shall “return upon their own heads^a” and *its* “sorrow shall be turned into joy^b ;” and “light and gladness and rest” for ever shall be its portion^c.

^a Esther ix. 25.

^b *Ibid.* 22.

^c *Ibid.* viii. 16.

THE END.

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